

BJP claims at least 45 killed in West Bengal panchayat polls, calls chief minister Mamata Banerjee 'ruthless'

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NEW DELHI: The BJP on Tuesday slammed the Trinamool Congress government over the "state-sponsored" violence during the West Bengal panchayat polls and called chief minister Mamata Banerjee "ruthless". The saffron party claimed that at least 45 people have died in the clashes.

Violence rocked the July 8 rural polls, leaving 15 dead while ballot boxes were vandalised, ballot papers burnt and bombs thrown at rivals in several places. Repolling was held on Monday in 696 booths across 19 districts where voting was declared void amid allegations of ballot box tampering and violence.

As counting began on Tuesday and initial trends started pouring in, the BJP's national spokesperson Sambit Patra claimed the ruling TMC's "dadagiri politics" was on even on the day of ballot counting. The BJP's counting agents and that of other opposition parties were being stopped from visiting the counting centres, he claimed at a press conference in the national capital and termed the poll violence "unprecedented". "Going by media reports, at least 45 people were killed during the panchayat poll violence. Bombing, bogus

voting and rigging are the most used words in media reports... This is 'nirmamata' (ruthlessness) and not 'mamata' (endearment)," Patra charged.

"These are state-sponsored institutionalised murders ... Nirmam Bandyopadhyay (ruthless Mamata Banerjee), who used to talk 'maa, maati,manush', is being a mute spectator," he alleged.

The BJP vehemently condemns the poll violence and "murder of democracy" in West Bengal, Patra said.

He also attacked the Congress, Left and other parties, accusing them of being silent on the matter.

"Where are Lalu Yadav, Nitish Kumar, Rahul Gandhi and other leaders of 'Maha Thug Bandhan'? Not a word from them so far," the BJP leader asked.

Patra alleged the Congress' top leadership and Rahul Gandhi, who was opening "mohabbat ki dukan" (shop of love), are silent on the panchayat poll violence in Bengal even though the leaders of the party claimed that their workers were killed.

"Rahul Gandhi is not talking about his 'mohabbat ki dukan' because his mega mall of ambition is open. He is silent on poll violence in West Bengal because he wants to become ruler of the country by hook or by crook," the BJP leader charged.

Patra said the Supreme Court had called for holding free and fair elections in West Bengal with the deployment of central forces. But the state government did not deploy central forces properly, he claimed, adding, "Data on sensitive polling booths were not shared with the central forces."

He claimed that a large number of people have fled West Bengal out of fear and have taken shelter in Assam.

"Is this democracy Mamata ji?" the BJP leader asked.

Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma claimed that over 100 people from West Bengal have taken shelter in his state, fearing for their lives because of the panchayat election violence back home.

"Yesterday, 133 individuals who feared for their lives due to violence in the panchayat election in West Bengal sought refuge in Dhubri district of Assam. We have provided them with shelter in a relief camp, as well as food and medical assistance," Sarma tweeted.